

AUSTRALIAN THEFTS OF PERFINNED STAMPS

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The use of perfinned postage stamps was widely promoted as a deterrent against the pilfering of the stamps, prompted by cases where office boys and others had been brought before the courts for such pilfering. Notwithstanding this publicity, there were still some who succumbed to temptation, and stole perfinned stamps. When the offenders were caught, the perfinned stamps were conclusive evidence of their rightful owners.

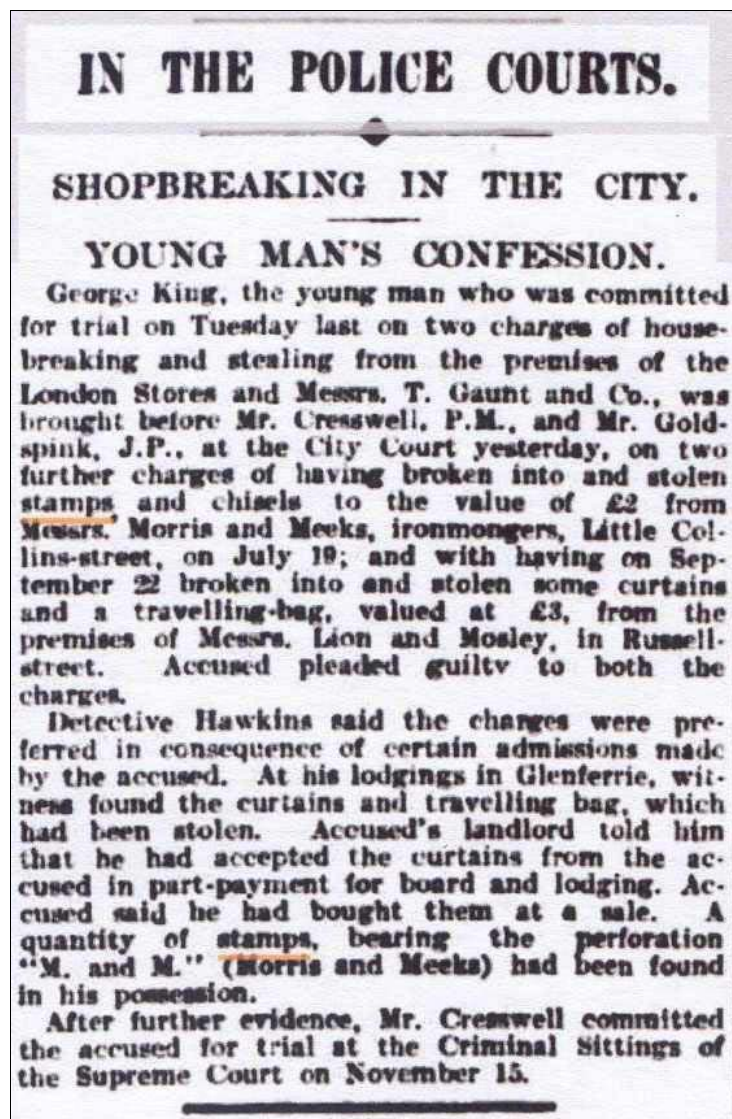


Fig. 1. Theft of "M&M" perfinned stamps

Three such cases have been found reported in Australian newspapers. In "The Argus", Melbourne, Victoria, it was reported that stamps with the perfin "M & M" (M&M.1) were found in the possession of the

thief (see Figure 1). They had been stolen from the premises of Messrs. Morris and Meeks on July 19, 1910. The accused pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment on 25 Nov. 1910.

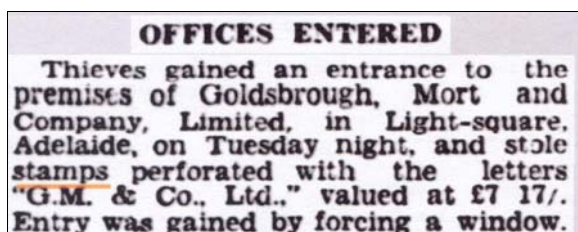


Fig. 2. Theft of "GM&COLTD" perforated stamps

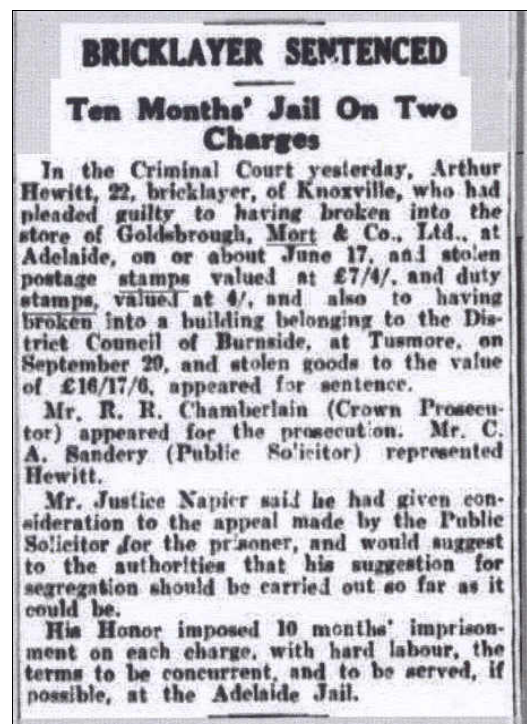
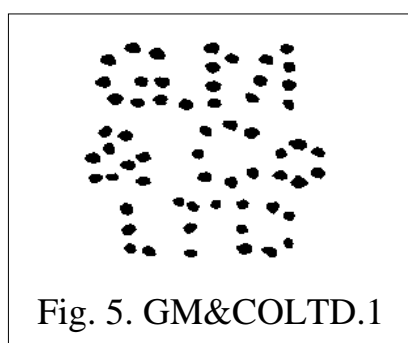
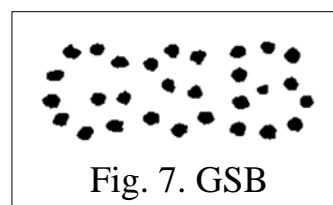
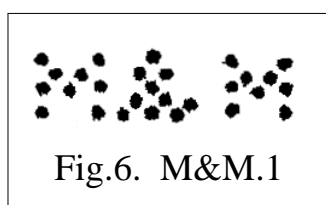


Fig. 3.
"GM&COLTD" thief convicted



In the second case, "The Advertiser", Adelaide, South Australia, reported stamps with perfin "G.M. & Co. Ltd" were stolen from the premises of Goldsbrough, Mort & Co. Ltd on 17 June 1930 (see Figure 2). The arrested man originally pleaded "not guilty", but changed his plea at his trial. He received a sentence of 10 months' imprisonment with hard labour for the theft.

The third case is highly unusual – the "felons" were 5 boys aged between 5 years and 11 years old! Figure 4 shows the newspaper report of their court appearance on 8 January 1913. Other reports, including the children's own evidence, appeared separately over the course of the court proceedings. Various boys said that they broke

into the Pymont [industrial inner suburb of Sydney - JM] branch of the Government Savings Bank of New South Wales on New Year's



Fig. 4.

Theft from Government Savings Bank

Day, a Wednesday. One boy said "We saw a notice on the door of the bank, 'Closed on Wednesday', so we broke into it." Another said "We saw an open window and got in." A third boy said "We found the key of the safe in the tin box and opened the safe." The two youngest boys, aged 5 and 7 years, had remained outside to keep watch! Detectives investigating the theft found "On the desk just inside the bank window the marks of a child's bare feet". The stolen property was recovered under their parents' residences in a nearby suburb, "and both the cheques and stamps [were] too dirty to be used again". The perfined stamps were stated to

have a denomination of one penny, so there were nearly 800 of them.

The two older boys were released on probation to the custody of their mothers for 18 months, on condition that they be of good behaviour, attend church on Sunday and day-school regularly, and keep out of bad company and away from the other boys charged. The third older boy was a second offender and was remanded for discipline to the shelter for fourteen days. The youngest two had, on the previous day, been committed to a correction centre on two other charges of breaking and entering, and were not further punished.

The three perfins are shown in Figures 5, 6 and 7 (not actual size). Due to the case of the reporting of the theft of the "M&M" perfined stamps, the identity of the user, having been previously suspected from matching directory entries, has now been able to be confirmed.